



**Statement by
Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace
(Item 9)**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

My name is Dulce De Jesus Soares, from East Timor, and I am speaking on behalf of Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace.

In February, Indonesian President Habibie announced the two options to the Timorese either accepting autonomy with Indonesia or rejecting it and becoming an independent nation. Following this, the situation in East Timor became unstable. Many Indonesians who were living and working in East Timor left the country. At the same time, those who were known to favour independence for East Timor became the victims of intimidation and violence at the hands of the Indonesian forces and the police.

Some of the pro-autonomy groups formed into so-called "militias", which worked together with the Indonesian military and police in intimidating people suspected of favouring independence. I was a member of a pro-independence group. On April 12, following the murder of a friend of ours, an Indonesian Army Lt. Col. threatened to kill my husband and me.

The Indonesian military then forced us to sign a document stating we were pro-autonomy. Because of the threat to our lives, my husband and I joined a pro-autonomy group. We thought this would help protect the lives of our family. We were, however, still really pro-independence and everything we learned about pro-autonomy or militia activities we passed on to independence leaders or to UNAMET.

Following the vote on 30 August, the Indonesian military and police, together with the militias, forced thousands of East Timorese to evacuate their homes and to move into police compounds and other detainment centres.

On September 4, I and my family were at home in Maliana, which is near the border with West Timor, when the results of the popular consultation were announced. Indonesian soldiers came to our house and we were afraid that they knew we were working behind the scenes to support the pro-independence movement. The military told us that we should go quickly to the police compound so that we could be transported to West Timor. We were told that we had to leave because the situation in Maliana was no longer safe.

But instead of going to the police compound, we drove to West Timor in our car. When we arrived in West Timor, we did not go to the refugee camp that was being set up by the Indonesian Government because we were afraid we would be harmed. Instead, we rented a house in a small village inside the city. The situation in the refugee camps was poor, with very bad health, sanitation and accommodation facilities.

Even though we were in the rented house, the militias came looking for those of us who they thought to be pro-independence. Because we knew some people were taken from the camps by the militias and killed, we decided to move to a place where we were protected by the Church.

In October, the representatives of UNHCR came to Indonesia to help the refugees to return to East Timor. We sent our relatives back to East Timor, but we stayed in West Timor. This was because we were afraid that people at home still thought we were pro-autonomy and might harm us. We decided not to go back until everyone had learned that we had been working behind the scenes for the independence movement.

After meeting with pro-independence leaders and friends from home and learning that it was safe to return, we decided to leave West Timor. However, we had to return secretly. We knew that the militia had killed many people who had tried to return to East Timor. We were afraid they would give us problems and try to kill us also. So we approached the Indonesian soldiers at the border and told them we wanted to go across the border that night. They allowed it, but we had to pay them 2 million Indonesian Rupiah. So we paid and were able to cross the border safely.

There are still many other people in the camps in West Timor who are afraid to come home or are not being allowed by the militias and the military to leave. The militias tell them lies, tell them they are not wanted in East Timor because they did not support independence. This is not true. Also, the Indonesian military demands payments from the refugees before they are allowed across the border. Even to get your name on a list with UNHCR a payment has to be made to the militia. And when refugees are finally allowed to return home, the militias confiscate all of the materials provided to them by UNHCR.

We, the people of East Timor want all of our brothers and sisters to come home. We have left our political differences behind, and we are working together to build our new country. It is time that all East Timorese be allowed to join us.

Thank you.